A Guide for Givers

A free companion to Meanwhile, in Galilee: Putting Jesus Back Into History, *by Elton B. Renda.*

This guide is for you if you're thinking of giving the book to a friend, a family member or a colleague, or reading it with a group. Maybe you're the person in your circle who believes, and you'd love the people you care about to meet Jesus. I've been on both sides of that conversation, so here's what I've learned.

Before You Give It

Know why you're giving it. The best reason is simple: you care about this person, and you think they'd find the history interesting. If the real reason is to win an argument, wait.

Be honest about what it is. This is a history book written by a Christian. It doesn't hide that, and neither should you. Tell them that every chapter marks what historians agree on, what they debate, and what is a matter of faith, and that the book never asks them to believe anything. It does end with an open invitation to read one of the Gospels, which they're free to accept or not. Mention that too, so there are no surprises.

Give it without strings. No deadline, no quiz, no "so what did you think?" the next morning. A gift with a hidden test isn't really a gift.

Pray, if you pray. For them, not for a result.

What You Might Say

Keep it short and natural. For example:

- "I read this and kept thinking of you. It puts Jesus next to Caesar and Cleopatra and the Roman emperors. Even if you never read the Bible, I think you'd find the history fascinating."
- "You know I'm a Christian, so this book is written from that side. But it's honest about where the evidence ends. I'd genuinely love to hear what you make of it."
- "No pressure at all. Read it if you're curious, pass it on if you're not."

Reading Together

If your friend, or a group, wants to read it with you, six conversations work well. Each chapter already ends with "Questions to Sit With"; pick one or two of those, or start with the big question below.

Meeting	Read	The big question
1	Before You Begin; Chapters 1–3	Before you started, where in history did you picture Jesus, and why?
2	Chapters 4–6	Which detail about Jesus' birth and childhood world surprised you most?
3	Chapters 7–9	What do you think it would have been like to grow up in Nazareth under Antipas and Rome?
4	Chapters 10–13	Which part of Jesus' teaching or actions do you find most striking, and most difficult?
5	Chapters 14–16	Of the explanations for what happened after the crucifixion, which do you find most convincing, and why?
6	Chapters 17–19 and the Conclusion	Where do you land, and what would it take to move you?

Reading it through Lent

The six meetings fit the weeks of Lent. This isn't a devotional; it's the history behind the story Lent walks through, which makes it a good choice for a group that includes friends who would never come to a Bible study. Start reading on Ash Wednesday and hold the first meeting the week after, so that the chapters on Jesus' last week, his death and the empty tomb fall in Holy Week, and the final meeting falls in the week after Easter.

Meeting	Week of (2027)	Read
1	21 February	Before You Begin; Chapters 1–3 (start on Ash Wednesday, 10 February)
2	28 February	Chapters 4–6
3	7 March	Chapters 7–9
4	14 March	Chapters 10–13
5	21 March (Holy Week)	Chapters 14–16
6	28 March (Easter week)	Chapters 17–19 and the Conclusion

In other years, put Meeting 5 in Holy Week and count back from there.

Tips for Good Conversations

- **Listen more than you talk.** Ask what they think before you say what you think.
- **"I don't know" is a great answer.** So is "Let's look it up together." The sources list at the back of the book is there for exactly that.
- **Respect the labels.** If the book calls something debated, don't present it as settled. If it calls something faith, share it as your faith, not as a historical fact. Overclaiming loses trust fast.
- **Treat doubts as honest.** Questions aren't attacks. Plenty of people in this book doubted too, including Jesus' own brothers.
- **Don't win the argument and lose the friend.** You can disagree warmly and still be friends next week.
- **Leave the door open.** The most important conversations often happen months later.

If They Want to Go Further

The book ends by inviting readers to read one of the Gospels for themselves. If your friend wants to take that step:

- **Suggest Luke or Mark.** Mark can be read in an evening; Luke reads like a historian's investigation.
- **Offer to read it with them**, a chapter at a time, over coffee.
- **Invite them to church only if they seem interested**, and go with them so they don't walk in alone.
- **Let it be their choice.** Your job is to be a good friend and an honest witness. The rest isn't up to you.

Questions, or a story to share? I'd love to hear from you at hello@eltonrenda.com.